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ACTION EUR-25

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SUBJECT: GENERAL ELECTION OUTLOOK--THE RUN-UP BEGINS

REF: LONDON 10669

SUMMARY: THE PROBABILITY OF A GENERAL ELECTION INCREASES STEADILY, WITH OCTOBER 3 GENERALLY VIEWED AS MOST LIKELY DATE. HOWEVER, POSSIBILITY OF LATER ELECTION CANNOT BE EXCLUDED. THE PACE OF CAMPAIGN RUN-UP ACTIVITY IS ALSO GROWING. PRIME MINISTER WILSON HAS ACCEPTED INVITATION TO SPEAK SEPTEMBER 5 AT TUC'S BRIGHTON CONGRESS AND IS EXPECTED TO LAUNCH LABOR'S PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN THAT FRIENDLY FORUM. LABOR HAS VIRTUALLY COMPLETED SELECTION OF ITS CONSTITUENCY CANDIDATES AND IS EXPECTED TO FINISH
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DRAFTING ITS ELECTION MANIFESTO BY SEPTEMBER 1. TORIES

TOOK TO TELEVISION AUGUST 28 TO DETAIL HOUSING POLICY WHICH PROMISES LOW COST MORTGAGES AND ELIMINATION OF RATES DURING LIFE OF NORMAL PARLIAMENT, PROVIDED OF COURSE CONSERVATIVES WIN ELECTION. PARTISAN RESPONSE TO CONSERVATIVE PROPOSAL RANGED HEATED TO SARCASTIC. LIBERAL LEADER THORPE BEGAN POLITICAL TOUR OF COASTAL VACATION AREAS AND PARTY ANNOUNCED CONTINGENCY PLANS FOR ANNUAL ASSEMBLY, SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 10-14, IN EVENT ELECTIONS ARE CALLED SHORTLY. NO RECENT POLL DATA PUBLISHED, BUT MEDIA DEVOTED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO "STRATEGIC VOTING" ELECTORAL TACTIC. END SUMMARY

1. REPORTED SLIP BY EMPLOYMENT MINISTER MICHAEL FOOT AND OTHER LABOR MPS AND PARTY SOURCES THAT LABOR IS SHOOTING FOR OCTOBER 3 ELECTION DATE UNDERSCORES OTHER SIGNS THAT WILSON WILL CALL GENERAL ELECTION FOR EARLY OCTOBER. MOST OBSERVERS LIKE OCTOBER 3 DATE, BUT OTHERS SUGGEST THAT SERIES OF ECONOMIC INDICATORS DUE TO BE PUBLISHED IN MID-SEPTEMBER WILL BE UNFAVORABLE AND COULD CAUSE WILSON TO DELAY ELECTIONS TO OCTOBER 10 OR LATER. ONLY CERTITUDES APPEAR TO BE THAT PRIME MINISTER WILL HOLD FINAL DECISION CLOSELY AND WILL SEEK TO MAXIMIZE LABOR'S ADVANTAGE.

2. WILSON ACCEPTED TUC INVITATION TO SPEAK AT ANNUAL CONGRESS IN BRIGHTON SEPTEMBER 5, FOLLOWING EARLIER APPEARANCE BY FOREIGN SECRETARY CALLAGHAN. TUC FORUM WILL ASSURE HEAVY MEDIA COVERAGE AND WOULD PROVIDE FRIENDLY, ENTHUSIASTIC AUDIENCE FOR ELECTION KICK-OFF. OTHER PREPARATIONS ARE MOVING APACE. ONLY 18 LABOR CONSTITUENCY CANDIDATES REMAIN TO BE SELECTED, AND THIS PROCESS WILL BE COMPLETED IN EARLY SEPTEMBER. LABOR'S ELECTION MANIFESTO WILL REPORTEDLY BE COMPLETED, THOUGH NOT PUBLISHED, THIS WEEKEND, AND A WORKING GROUP HAS ALREADY LEAKED DETAILS OF PARTY'S DEVOLUTION PROPOSAL FOR SCOTLAND, WHERE SCOTTISH NATIONALIST PARTY (SNP) COULD DAMAGE LABOR'S CHANCES FOR A PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY, AND WALES.

3. CONSERVATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL SPOKESWOMAN MARGARET LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THATCHER APPEARED ON A SPECIAL TELEVISION PROGRAM AUGUST 28 TO OUTLINE THE PARTY'S HOUSING POLICH WHICH, INTER ALIA, WOULD: PEG MORTGAGE RATES AT 9-1/2 PERCENT; ESTABLISH A HOME SAVINGS GRANT SCHEME; PERMIT PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS TO BUY THEIR UNITS; AND ELIMINATE THE CURRENT RATES SYSTEM "WITHIN THE NORMAL LIFETIME OF A PARLIAMENT." CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT WOULD BEGIN RATES REFORM IMMEDIATELY WITH GOVERNMENT ASSUMING SALARY COST

FOR TEACHERS AND OTHERS (LONDON 10290). LABOR SPOKESMAN BRANDED TORY HOUSING PROPOSALS AS "IRRESPONSIBLE," "HUMBUG" AND "A CRUDE ATTEMPT TO BUY VOTES." LIBERAL COMMENT WAS LESS CAUSTIC, BUT IS IN SIMILAR VEIN. TORY LEADERS ALSO RESPONDED TO EARLIER LABOR CHARGES THAT PARTY SUPPORTS FORMATION OF "PRIVATE ARMIES" SUCH AS GB 75 (LONDON 10914) BY DENYING THE ALLEGATION AND CRYING FOUL. THEY CONDEMNED SUCH GROUPS ALBEIT MILDLY, AND CHARACTERIZED THEIR LEADERS AS "MISGUIDED." IN A RELATED DEVELOPMENT, PRESS REPORTS CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP'S BETE NOIRE ENOCH POWELL MAY ACCEPT UNIONIST CANDIDACY IN ULSTER WHICH WOULD PROBABLY ASSURE HIS RETURN TO PARLIAMENT.

4. LIBERAL LEADER THORPE'S HOVERCRAFT TOUR OF COASTAL VACATION SITES IS RECEIVING EXTENSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE. HE IS REPORTEDLY BEING MET BY FRIENDLY CROWDS. ON AUGUST 29 LIBERAL SPOKESMEN TOLD PRESS THAT PARTY ASSEMBLY SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 10-14 WILL BE CANCELLED IF WILSON CALLS ELECTIONS NEXT WEEK. IF ELECTIONS CALLED LATER, BUT BEFORE SEPTEMBER 10, PARTY WILL CUT ASSEMBLY TO TWO DAYS. SINCE THIS MEETING NORMALLY ATTRACTS HEAVY MEDIA COVERAGE AND WOULD ENHANCE THE LIBERAL'S POPULAR STANDING (STANDING IN OPINION POLLS REACHED UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS FOLLOWING LAST YEAR'S ASSEMBLY) ITS CANCELLATION COULD HURT LIBERAL ELECTION PROSPECTS.

5. THERE HAS BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT OPINION POLL DATA PUBLISHED RECENTLY. THE MEDIA, HOWEVER, HAVE PAID INCREASING ATTENTION TO "STRATEGIC VOTING" CONCEPT WHEREBY MAJOR PARTY SUPPORTERS CAST VOTE FOR MINOR PARTY CANDIDATE TO PREVENT THE OTHER MAJORITY PARTY FROM GAINING THE SEAT (E.G. IN A CONSTITUENCY WHERE LABOR RUNS THIRD, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LABOR SUPPORTERS VOTE FOR THE LIBERAL CANDIDATE TO PREVENT A TORY WIN). WHILE AVAILABLE TO ALL PARTIES, THIS TACTIC WOULD ONLY BE USEFUL TO ONE OF THE MAJOR PARTIES IF IT DESIRED TO PLAY SPOILER ROLE. SOME OBSERVERS ATTRIBUTE SNP'S SUCCESS IN THE FEBRUARY ELECTIONS TO SUCH VOTING BY LABOR LOYALISTS. THE CONSERVATIVES, OF COURSE, COULD USE THIS TACTIC AGAINST LABOR IN SCOTLAND THE NEXT TIME AROUND. EXTENSIVE UTILIZATION OF THIS TACTIC WOULD FURTHER REDUCE THE UTILITY OF OPINION POLLS IN FORECASTING THE ELECTORAL OUTCOME. SOHM

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